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“M. de Sismondi is one of those men who have done most honor to literature by the greatness of their labors and by the dignity of their lives. No one has more earnestly considered the duties of intellect. Amiable in his private relations, devoted in friendship, indulgent towards others, severe to himself, endowed with an activity which never at any time relaxed, with a sincerity which never on any occasion belied itself, he possessed in the highest degree the love of justice and a passion for good. With these noble sentiments he has imbued politics, history, social economy; he made these contribute to the cautious progress of the institutions of states, to the instruction and well-being of nations. For half a century he has thought nothing that was not honorable, written nothing that was not moral, wished nothing that was not useful; thus has he left a glorious memory, which will be ever respected. In him the Academy has lost one of its most eminent associates, Geneva one of her most illustrious citizens, humanity one of its most devoted defenders.” — p. 24.

ART. III. — 1. *The Dramatic Works of RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN. With a Biographical and Critical Sketch.* By LEIGH HUNT. London: Edward Moxon. 8vo. pp. 153.

2. *Speeches of the RIGHT HONORABLE RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN.* Edited by a Constitutional Friend. London: Henry G. Bohn. 3 vols. 8vo.

THE elegant edition of Sheridan's dramatic works, published by Moxon, betrays one strange blunder, by including the entertainment of *The Camp*, a feeble farce written by Sheridan's friend Tickell, and altogether unworthy of preservation in any form. The biography furnished by Leigh Hunt possesses little merit beyond an occasional luckiness of phrase and an occasional felicity of criticism. It is written with more than his usual languid jauntiness of style, and with less than his usual sweetness of fancy. Indeed, that cant of good feeling and conceit of heartiness, which, expressed in a certain sparkling flatness of style, constitute so much of the intellectual capital of Hunt's sentimental old age, are as out of place, in a consideration of the sharp, shining wit, the elabo-

rate diction, and polished artifice of Sheridan's writings, as in the narration of the brilliant depravities and good-natured good-for-nothingness of Sheridan's character. Like all Hunt's essays, however, it is exceedingly amusing, even in its vivacious presumption and genial pertness ; but a man like Sheridan, the dramatist, the orator, the politician, the boon companion,

" The pride of the palace, the bower, and the hall,"

deserved a less supercilious consideration. Hunt's sketch conveys a far more vivid impression of himself than of his subject.

The prominent qualities of Sheridan's character were ambition and indolence, the love of distinction and the love of pleasure ; and the method by which he contrived to gratify both may be said to constitute his biography. From the volatility of his mind and conduct, it would be a misuse of language to say that he had good principles or bad principles. He had no principles at all. His life was a life of expedients and appearances, in which he developed a shrewdness and capacity made up of talent and mystification, of ability and trickery which were found equal to almost all emergencies. He most assuredly possessed neither great intellect nor great passions. There was nothing commanding in his mind, nothing deep and earnest in his heart. A good-humored selfishness and a graceful heartlessness were his best substitutes for virtue. His conduct, when not determined by sensuality, was determined by vanity, the sensuality of the intellect ; and in both he followed external direction. Yet, such as he was, the son of an actor, indolent, immoral, unlearned, a libertine and a drunkard, without fortune and without connections, he achieved high social, literary, and Parliamentary distinction. His life was one long career of notoriety and sensuality. At the age of twenty-six he had written some of the most sparkling comedies in the English language. From that period he became a politician, and eventually was ranked with Burke, Fox, and Pitt, among the most accomplished orators in the House of Commons. No man with such moral habits, joined to such slender acquirements, ever raised himself to such an elevation by pure force of tact and talent. It might be said that Fox was as dissipated ; but then Sheridan, unlike Fox, had not been educated for a leg-

islator ; and more than all, he had none of Fox's power of impassioned argumentation, none of his greatness and generosity of soul. Burke, like Sheridan, attained a prominent position in the most aristocratic of parties, without the advantages of birth and connections ; but then he had the advantage of being the greatest statesman of his country, and Sheridan could make no pretensions to Burke's force of character and amplitude of comprehension, to his industry, his learning, or to that fiery and flexible imagination which penetrated all with vital life. It must be allowed that Sheridan approached neither of these men in solid reputation, but as his ambition was but one side of his love of pleasure, the notoriety which immediately succeeded his efforts was all he desired. His vanity fed and his senses gratified, there was little left for ambition to seek or pleasure to crave. All that there is in immediate fame to intoxicate the possessor, all that there is in fame which can be *enjoyed*, he obtained with the smallest possible scorning of delights, and the smallest possible living of laborious days.

Sheridan was essentially a man of wit. By this we do not mean that he was merely a witty man, but that wit was as much the predominant element in his character as it was the largest power of his mind. From his habit of looking at life and its duties through the medium of epigram, he lost all sincerity of thought and earnestness of passion. From his power of detecting what was inconsistent, foolish, and bad in the appearances of things, he gradually came to estimate appearances more than realities, and to do every thing himself for effect. His intellect became an ingenious machine for the manufacture of what would tell on the occasion, without regard to truth or falsehood. The consequence was a wonderful power of contrivance, of shrewdness, of *finesse*, of brilliant insincerity, without any vitality of thought and principle, without any intellectual character. His moral sense, also, gradually wore away under a habit of sensual indulgence, and a habit of overlooking moral consequences in ludicrous relations. His conscience could give him no pang which a jest could not heal. Vice, therefore, appeared to his mind as pleasantry as well as pleasure, and wit "pandered will." For instance, he was notoriously unfaithful to his marriage vow. To no man could adultery wear a more jocose aspect. "In marriage," he says, "if you possess any thing good, it makes

you eager to get every thing else good of the same sort." He made no scruple of cheating his creditors, but to his mind dishonesty was merely a practical joke. It was the same with every thing else. Crime appeared to him as a kind of mischievous fun, and Belial always reeled into his meditations hand in hand with Momus. Blasphemy, intemperance, adultery, sloth, licentiousness, trickery, — they were mere jests. No man ever violated all the common duties of life with such easy good-nature and absence of malignant passions. He became un-moral rather than immoral.

In considering Sheridan's career, we continually meet this wit as a disposition of character as well as a power of mind. It gives a lightness and airiness to the many rascalities and insincerities of his life. No man's vices have been more leniently treated, because their very relation provokes a smile. He fascinates posterity as he fascinated his contemporaries. Falsehood, heartlessness, sensuality, *finesse*, all those qualities which bring contempt on other men, in him wear an attractive aspect ; and in consideration of his being such a "good fellow," the common rules by which we judge of character have been waived in his case by general consent.

It would be impossible to set forth the talents of this remarkable adept in mystification and Regius Professor of appearances, without some sketch of his life. He was the son of Thomas Sheridan, the actor and elocutionist, and was born in Dublin, in the month of September, 1751. His father was a man of no mean capacity, but spoiled by an obstinate conceit of his powers, which made his talents pass with others for less than they were worth. His mother, whom Dr. Parr pronounced quite celestial, was the writer of two or three plays, the novel of Sidney Biddulph, and the Tale of Nourjahad. Her nature was much finer than her husband's, a fact she contrived to conceal almost as much from herself as from him. Richard early displayed an indisposition to learn ; and rather than relinquish the sports for the studies of boyhood, he endured with heroical resignation the stigma fastened upon him by his father, of being an "impenetrable dunce." In 1762, he was sent to Harrow, then under the direction of Dr. Robert Sumner, and having for one of its under-masters no less distinguished a person than Dr. Parr. Neither of these eminent scholars could overcome, either by command or persuasion, his indolence and indiffer-

ence, though their exertions were prompted by the conviction that his mind was naturally of no common order. The fact that some of his aristocratical school-fellows taunted him with being "a player's son," however much it might sting his sensitive vanity, could not rouse in him the spirit of emulation. He preferred to make both masters and pupils his friends by his good-humor and engaging manners, and was soon the most popular person in the school. The boys emulously prompted him in the recitations of the class ; and his brilliant mischievousness as often amused as provoked the masters. He seems to have escaped the discipline of the rod even under such a believer in the birch as Dr. Parr. That good-natured audacity and that fascinating address, which captivated so many in his subsequent career, and rarely forsook him in the wreck of character and fortune, were partially developed in his youth. But he was not happy at school. He was constantly in that state of wretchedness which results from the struggle of vanity with indolence, — for years always behind his companions, and trusting to momentary expedients to escape the consequences of idleness.

At Harrow he remained until his seventeenth year, and left it with but a distant acquaintance with any branch of knowledge, imperfectly versed even in grammar and spelling, but still with some dexterity in English verse, and some knowledge of polite literature. We should judge that Pope and Wycherley had been his favorite authors, not merely because his rhymes were modelled on the one and his plays betray the influence of the other, but because he always pretended to dislike Pope and to be ignorant of Wycherley. He never seems thoroughly to have mastered the mystery of spelling. At the age of twenty he spelt thing, *think*, whether, *wether*, which, *wich*, where, *were*, and appeared to take a malignant delight in interfering with the domestic felicity of double *m*-s and *s*-s. At Harrow he was not considered vicious by Dr. Parr, who charged his subsequent irregularities upon his being thrown upon the world without a profession. At the period of his leaving school he was strikingly handsome, with that fire and brilliancy in his eyes which afterwards added so much to the effect of his oratory.

He was not sent to the university, either from his father's inability to bear the expense, or from a despair of its effect in making him a student. The elder Sheridan took him

home, and undertook to complete his education under his own eye ; but Richard proved as indocile a pupil there as at school, and carelessly followed his own tastes. At Harrow he had formed a friendship with a vivacious school-fellow, named Halhed, who was afterwards a judge in India, and in connection with him had translated into English verse some of the poems of Theocritus. Halhed went to Oxford, but kept up a correspondence with Sheridan at Bath. They projected various works, among which was a farce entitled *Jupiter*, a volume of loose stories to be called *Crazy Tales*, and a translation of *Aristænetus*. The latter was completed, though Sheridan's portion was long delayed by his indolence, and the incessant references he was compelled to make to his dictionary. It was published in 1771, but failed to bring either the fame or profit which the juvenile book-makers had anticipated. The book in itself is worthless, both in the original and translation, but the latter is curious as indicating the light and libertine tone of thought, and the command of florid commonplaces of diction, which Sheridan had acquired at the age of nineteen. Neither in its morality nor composition does it give any promise of future excellence in life or letters.

But the peculiar character of his mind, and the style in which he was eventually to excel, are well displayed in a small ironical essay, written about the year 1770, and devoted to a mock assignment of reasons why the Duke of Grafton should not lose his head. The meanness, fickleness, unpunctuality, and licentiousness of the noble duke are quite felicitously caricatured. The position is gravely taken, that his Grace's crimes are not of such a nature as "to entitle his head to a place on Temple Bar"; and to the charge of giddiness and neglect of public duty the author triumphantly opposes some undoubted facts.

"I think," he observes, "I could bring several instances which would seem to promise the greatest steadiness and resolution. I have known him to make the Council wait, on the business of the whole nation, when he had an appointment to Newmarket. Surely, this is an instance of the greatest honor ; — and if we see him so punctual in private appointments, must we not conclude he is infinitely more so in greater matters ? Nay, when Wilkes came over, is it not notorious that the Lord Mayor went to his Grace on that evening, proposing a scheme, which, by securing this fire-brand, might have put an end to all the troubles he has

caused? But his Grace did not see him; — no, he was a man of too much honor; — he had *promised* that evening to attend Nancy Parsons to Ranelagh, and he would not disappoint her, but made three thousand people witnesses of his punctuality.”

We perceive here that covert, sharp edge of ingenious wit, which was silently fashioning Sheridan’s mind and character.

During the first few years after leaving school, Sheridan seems to have lived in his father’s family, without any definite purpose in life, and only varying the monotony of gayety and idleness with occasional experiments in composition. In 1771, he published a poem called *Clio’s Protest*, or the *Picture Varnished*, in which the principal beauties of Bath are celebrated in some four hundred rather loose-jointed octosyllabic lines. There is one couplet, however, which has become classic: —

“ You write with ease to show your breeding,
But easy writing ’s curst hard reading.”

In this poem, also, there are eight lines which altogether exceed any other poetical attempts of Sheridan, where the least pretension is made to sentiment.

“ Marked you her cheek of rosy hue ?
Marked you her eye of sparkling blue ?
That eye in liquid circles moving ;
That cheek abashed at man’s approving ;
The one Love’s arrows darting round ;
The other blushing at the wound :
Did she not speak, did she not move,
Now Pallas, now the Queen of Love ? ”

At Bath, Sheridan fell in love with Miss Linley, a fascinating young singer of sixteen, whose beauty and accomplishments had turned the heads of the whole town. In his management of the affair he displayed as much *finesse* as passion. Among a crowd of suitors he seems to have been the only one who had touched her heart, and the only one whose intentions were concealed. His brother, Charles Francis Sheridan, and his friend Halhed, were among his rivals, yet both were ignorant of his passion, and both made him their confidant. The father of Miss Linley seems to have looked upon her from an exclusively business point of view, and would, of course, naturally oppose her engagement to a penniless idler like Sheridan. His project of her life

was simply this : money was to be made by her profession as a vocalist, and her singing was to lead the way to a profitable marriage. Indeed, he had already engaged her hand to an honest-hearted elderly gentleman by the name of Long, but she escaped from the engagement just before the period set for the marriage, by secretly representing to him the impossibility of his ever gaining her affections. He magnanimously broke off the alliance, without betraying the reason, and when Mr. Linley threatened a prosecution, generously settled £ 3,000 upon her to satisfy the father's demands. Romance has hardly a nobler instance of disinterestedness, and certainly Miss Linley never possessed, in lover or husband, so true and unselfish a friend.

Then followed her elopement and the scandal about Captain Mathews. This portion of domestic history is still involved in perplexing contradictions. As far as we can glean the facts, they are these. Miss Linley had become disgusted with her profession, partly from the intrigues of Sheridan to push his suit, partly from her being pestered with the dishonorable advances of a married libertine by the name of Mathews. It has been asserted that the latter had touched her heart as well as awakened her fears, and also that Sheridan assisted or prompted his addresses, probably as a refined stratagem to force her into a position which would make his services necessary to her peace and honor. In that tumult of mind springing from the conflict of various fears and passions, she formed the romantic determination, advised or supported by Sheridan, of eloping to France, and entering a convent. He offered to be her protector in the journey, was accepted, and the design was at once carried into effect. On arriving at London, he raised the necessary funds for the expedition from an old brandy merchant, a friend of his father, by representing that he was running away to France with an heiress. At Calais, according to the most trustworthy accounts, he persuaded her that her character was so compromised by her elopement, that its salvation depended on an immediate marriage with him. They were accordingly secretly united, in March, 1772. Mr. Linley overtook them at Calais, but not before the ceremony had been performed, and after some explanation of the affair from Sheridan, in which the private marriage does not appear to have been mentioned, took his daughter back to England. Sheridan

also returned, to brave an exasperated father, and to fight a couple of duels with Captain Mathews, in the last of which he was seriously wounded. But with all his fine-spun intrigues and their unpleasant results, there did not appear to be any hope of his being able to claim his wife. The elder Sheridan and Mr. Linley were both opposed to the union, and both seemingly ignorant that a marriage had occurred. Every precaution was employed to keep the lovers apart. Mr. Thomas Sheridan made his son take an oath never "to marry" Miss Linley. Mr. Linley cautiously watched his daughter. A year's war of cunning and contrivance ensued, in which Sheridan was of course victorious. Among other expedients to see her, he at one time disguised himself as a hackney-coachman, and drove her home from the concert-room. They were finally married, according to the English fashion, in April, 1773, — having fairly outwitted their parents in all their schemes, and at last obtained their consent or connivance to the union. The elder Sheridan, however, discarded his son, and was not reconciled to him for years.

During this excited period of his life, Sheridan did not sacrifice his characteristic indolence and habit of procrastination. A shamefully libellous account of his second duel with Captain Mathews was published in a Bath paper. Indignant at this impudent lie, he resolved to answer it immediately, but first told his friend Woodfall to publish it in his paper, in order that the public might see the charge and the refutation. Woodfall followed his directions, circulated the scandal through his columns, but never could induce Sheridan to write the promised exposure of the calumny. This is in perfect character, — to hazard his life in two duels, and then bear the imputation of cowardice rather than take the trouble of writing a letter!

The circumstances which attended his courtship and marriage gave him great notoriety. His own talents and fascinating manners, together with the musical and personal accomplishments of his wife, naturally brought him into much society. For nearly two years, he subsisted, after his own mysterious fashion, with no known income except the interest on the £ 3,000 settled by Mr. Long on Mrs. Sheridan. Though he was entered as a student in the Temple, neither his intellectual nor social tastes would admit of a serious study of the law. But during this period he wrote the ex-

hilarating comedy of *The Rivals*, which was produced at Covent Garden in January, 1775. It failed on the first night, from the stupidity or indifference of the actor who performed Sir Lucius O'Trigger. Another having been substituted in this part, the play was very successful, and has been popular ever since. It placed Sheridan, at the age of twenty-three, at the head of living dramatists. Nothing so brilliant had been brought out on the English stage since Farquhar; and while its wit and hilarity suggested the old school of comic dramatists, it was open to no objection on the score of decency.

The design of Sheridan in *The Rivals* was not dramatic excellence, but stage effect. In seeing it performed, we overlook, in the glitter and point of the dialogue, the absence of the higher requisites of comedy. The plot is without progress and development. The characters are overcharged into caricatures, and can hardly be said to be conceived, much less sustained. Each has some oddity stuck upon him, which hardly rises to a peculiarity of character, and the keeping of this oddity is carelessly sacrificed at every temptation from a lucky witticism. The comic personages seem engaged in an emulous struggle to outshine each other. What they are is lost sight of in what they say. Sparkling sentences are bountifully lavished upon all. Fag and David are nearly as sparkling as their masters. The scene in the fourth act, where Acres communicates to David his challenge to Beverley, is little more than a brilliant string of epigrams and repartees, in which the country clown plays the dazzling fence of his wit with all the skill of Sheridan himself. When Acres says that no gentleman will lose his honor, David is ready with the brisk retort, that it then "would be but civil in honor never to risk the loss of a gentleman." Acres swears, "odds crowns and laurels," that he will not disgrace his ancestors by refusing to fight. David assures him, in an acute *non sequitur*, that the surest way of not disgracing his ancestors is to keep as long as he can out of their company. "Look'ee now, master, to go to them in such haste — with an ounce of lead in your brains — I should think might as well be let alone. Our ancestors are a very good sort of folks, but they are the last people I should choose to have a visiting acquaintance with." No dramatist whose conception of character was strong would fall into such shining inconsistencies.

The truth is, in this, as in Sheridan's other comedies, we tacitly overlook the keeping of character in the blaze of the wit. Every body laughs at Mrs. Malaprop's mistakes in the use of words, as he would laugh at similar mistakes in an acquaintance, who was exercising his ingenuity instead of exposing his ignorance. They are too felicitously infelicitous to be natural. Her remark to Lydia, that she is "as head-strong as an allegory on the banks of the Nile," — her scorn of "algebra, simony, fluxions, paradoxes, and such inflammatory branches of learning," — her quotation from Hamlet, in which the royal Dane is gifted with the "front of Job himself," — her fear of going into "hydrostatic fits," — her pride in the use of "her oracular tongue and a nice derangement of epitaphs," — are characteristics, not of a mind flip-pantly stupid, but curiously acute. In the scene where Lydia Languish tells her maid to conceal her novels at the approach of company, the sentimentalist is lost in the witty rake; "Lord Ainsworth" being ordered to be thrust under the sofa, and "The Innocent Adultery" to be put into "The Whole Duty of Man."

Sir Anthony Absolute is the best character of the piece, and is made up of the elder Sheridan and Smollet's Matthew Bramble. Doubtless Sheridan had many a conversation with his father, of which the first scene between Sir Anthony and Captain Absolute is but a ludicrously heightened description. The scenes, also, where the doctrine and discipline of duelling are discussed, and in which Acres and Sir Lucius shine with so much splendor, the author may have obtained in the course of his difficulties with Captain Mathews. Falkland is a satire on a state of mind which Sheridan himself experienced during his courtship of Miss Linley. The fine talk of Falkland and Julia is as unintentionally ludicrous as any comic portion of the play. We can easily imagine how the author himself might have made Puff ridicule it. Indeed, Sheridan's attempts at serious imagery rarely reached beyond capitalizing the names of abstract qualities, or running out commonplace similes into flimsy and feeble allegories. His sentiment, also, is never fresh, generous, and natural, but almost always as tasteless in expression as hollow in meaning. The merit of *The Rivals* is in its fun and farce; and the serious portions, lugged in to make it appear more like a regular comedy, are worse than the attempts of Holcroft, Morton, and Reynolds in the same style.

The farce of *St. Patrick's Day*, which Sheridan brought out a few months after *The Rivals*, though written in evident haste, bears, in a few passages, marks of that elaborate and fanciful wit in which the chief strength of his mind consisted. In the second scene of the first act, the dialogue between Lauretta and her mother, on the relative merits of militia and regular officers, is keen and sparkling. "Give me," says Lauretta, "the bold, upright youth, who makes love to-day, and has his head shot off to-morrow. Dear ! to think how the sweet fellows sleep on the ground and fight in silk stockings and lace ruffles." To this animated burst of girlish admiration, Mrs. Bridget contemptuously replies : — "To want a husband that may wed you to-day and be sent the Lord knows where before night ; then in a twelve-month, perhaps, to come home like a Colossus, with one leg at New York and the other at Chelsea Hospital !" This is one of the most startlingly ludicrous fancies in Sheridan's works.

The success of *The Rivals* seems to have inspired Sheridan with industry as well as ambition, for during the summer of this year he wrote the delightful opera of *The Duenna*. It was produced at Covent Garden in November, 1775, and had the unprecedented run of seventy-five nights, exceeding even the success of *The Beggar's Opera* by twelve nights.

The diction of *The Duenna*, and the management of its character and incident, evince a marked improvement upon *The Rivals*. The wit, though not so intellectual as that of *The School for Scandal*, is so happily combined with heedless animal spirits, as often to produce the effect of humor. It glitters and plays like heat-lightning through the whole dialogue. Epigram, repartee, and jest sparkle on the lips of every character. The power of permeating every thing with wit and glee — love, rage, cunning, avarice, religion — is displayed to perfection. It touches lightly, but keenly, on that point in every subject which admits of ludicrous treatment, and overlooks or blinks the rest. The best of the songs are but epigrams of sentiment. There is a spirit of joyous mischievousness and intrigue pervading the piece, which gives a delicious excitement to the brain. Little Isaac, the cunning, overreaching, and overreached Jew, is the very embodiment of gleeful craft, — "roguish,

perhaps, but keen, devilish keen." The scene in which he woos the Duenna, and that which succeeds with Don Jerome, are among the most exquisite in the play. The sentiment of the piece is all subordinated to its fun and mischief. The scene in the Priory with the jolly monks is the very theology of mirth. Father Augustine tells his brothers of some sinner who has left them a hundred ducats to be remembered in their masses. Father Paul orders the money to be paid to the wine-merchant, and adds, "We will remember him in our cups, which will do just as well." When asked if they have finished their devotions, their reply is, "Not by a bottle each."

The wit of *The Duenna* is so diffused through the dialogue as not readily to admit of quotation. It sparkles over the piece like sunshine on the ripples of running water. There are, however, a few sentences which stand apart in isolated brilliancy, displaying that curious interpenetration of fancy and wit, in which Sheridan afterwards excelled. Such is Isaac's description of the proud beauty,—"the very rustling of her silk has a disdainful sound"; and his answer to Don Ferdinand's furious demand to know whither the absconding lovers have gone:—"I will, I will! but people's memories differ; some have a treacherous memory: now mine is a cowardly memory,—it takes to its heels at the sight of a drawn sword, it does i' faith; and I could as soon fight as recollect." In the same vein is Don Jerome's observation on the face of the Duenna:—"I thought that dragon's front of thine would cry aloof to the sons of gallantry; steel-traps and spring-guns seemed writ in every wrinkle of it." The description of the same old lady's face, as "parchment on which Time and Deformity have engrossed their titles," was omitted in the published copy; though brilliant, he could afford to lose it. The Duenna's delineation of little Isaac, after that deluded Jew has called her as "old as his mother and as ugly as the Devil," reaches the topmost height of contemptuous hyperbole. "Dare such a thing as you," she exclaims, "pretend to talk of beauty? a walking rondeau!—a body that seems to owe all its consequence to the dropsy!—a pair of eyes like two dead beetles in a wad of brown dough!—a beard like an artichoke, with dry, shrivelled jaws which would disgrace the mummy of a monkey!" But perhaps the most purely

intellectual stroke of pleasantry is the allusion to Isaac, — who has forsworn the Jewish faith, and “has not had time to get a new one,” — as standing “like a dead wall between church and synagogue, or like the blank leaves between the Old and New Testament.”

Mr. Moore has given a few sentences from the manuscript of *The Duenna* which do not appear in the printed copy. Among these is the following fine soliloquy of Lopez, the servant of Don Ferdinand : —

“A plague on these haughty damsels, say I: — when they play their airs on their whining gallants, they ought to consider that we are the chief sufferers, — we have all their ill-humors at second-hand. Donna Louisa’s cruelty to my master usually converts itself into blows by the time it gets to me; she can frown me black and blue at any time, and I shall carry the marks of the last box on the ear she gave him to my grave. Nay, if she smiles on any one else, I am the sufferer for it; if she says a civil word to a rival, I am a rogue and a scoundrel; and if she sends him a letter, my back is sure to pay the postage.”

Sheridan’s brilliant success as a dramatist led to his investments in theatrical property, — a fertile source of pecuniary difficulties to him in after years. In June, 1776, he purchased a portion of Garrick’s share in the patent of Drury Lane Theatre. For this property he paid £10,000. How he obtained the money has never been ascertained. Hunt conjectures that it was borrowed from some wealthy nobleman. But the mysterious principles of Sheridan’s science of finance, or *finesse*, have never been laid open. He afterwards, in 1778, bought Mr. Lacy’s moiety for £45,000, and thus having the control of the theatre, he made his father the manager, — a reconciliation having taken place a short time before. In raising all this money Sheridan must have displayed a power of persuasion and management which would have done honor to a Chancellor of the Exchequer. It is doubtful if even Mr. Pitt, who performed miracles in the way of loans, ever equalled it.

The first fruit of Sheridan’s new interest in the drama was *A Trip to Scarborough*, altered, with but few additions, from Sir John Vanbrugh’s *Relapse*. This was really a service to the cause both of comedy and decency, for the original play, though one of the most richly humorous in the language, and in *Lord Foppington*, Sir Tunbelly Clumsey,

and Miss Hoyden, containing characters which could not well be lost to the stage, was still conceived in so libertine a spirit, and deformed with so audacious a coarseness of expression, that it must soon have passed from the list of acting plays. This comedy shows us at once the superiority of Vanbrugh to Sheridan in humor and dramatic portraiture, and his inferiority in wit and polish. Sheridan could not have delineated with such consistency of purpose that prince of coxcombs, Lord Foppington. As an illustration of the difference between the manner of the two dramatists, we extract a portion of the dialogue between Young Fashion and his brother, on the return of the former to his native country, a penniless adventurer :—

“ *Fashion*. Now your people of business are gone, brother, I hope I may obtain a quarter of an hour’s audience with you.

“ *Lord Fop*. Faith, Tam, I must beg you ’ll excuse me at this time, for I have an engagement which I would not break for the salvation of mankind.

“ *Fash*. Shall you be back to dinner?

“ *Lord Fop*. As God shall judge me, I can’t tell; for it is possible I may dine with some friends at Donner’s.

“ *Fash*. Shall I meet you there? For I must needs talk with you.

“ *Lord Fop*. That I ’m afraid may n’t be quite so proper; for those I commonly eat with are a people of nice conversation; and you know, Tam, your education has been a little at large. But there are other ordinaries in town, very good beef ordinaries,—I suppose, Tam, you can eat beef? — However, dear Tam, I ’m glad to see thee in England, stap my vitals!”

This is the perfection of coxcombical heartlessness and egotism,—the sublime of ideal frippery. It is easy to distinguish here between the hearty exaggeration of humor and the hard caricature of wit.

Sheridan reached the height of his dramatic fame in May, 1777, by the production of *The School for Scandal*, a comedy which still occupies the first place on the stage, and which will ever be read with delight for the splendor, condensation, and fertility of its wit, the felicitous contrivance of some scenes and situations, the general brilliancy of its matter, and the tingling truth of its satirical strokes. As a representation of men as they appear, and manners as they are, it has the highest merit. The hypocrisies of life were

never more skilfully probed, or its follies exposed to an ordeal of more polished scorn. It was triumphantly successful from the first, and during its long run exceeded most other attractions of town life. Probably no comedy ever cost its author more toil, or was the slow result of more experiments in diction and scenic effect. It was commenced before *The Rivals*. With his usual sagacity, Sheridan contrived that it should appear, in a great measure, as the hasty product of an indolent genius, spurred into activity by the pressure of business engagements. Mr. Moore, in his life of the author, has introduced us into the workshop of the literary mechanic, shown us the scattered limbs of the characters, the disjointed sentences of the dialogue, and the little grains of diamond dust as they first sparkled into substantial being. Every portion was elaborated with the nicest care, — not to purchase elegance by dilution, but to fix the volatile essence of thought in the smallest compass of expression, to sharpen the edge of satire to the finest point, to give scorn its keenest sting. Beginning with weakness and verbiage, he did not end until he had reduced his matter to the consistency as well as glitter of the most polished steel.

The last contribution of Sheridan to dramatic literature was the farce of *The Critic*, produced in 1779; we say the last, for his adaptations of *Pizarro* and *The Stranger*, twenty years after, were contributions neither to literature nor the stage. *The Critic* excels every thing of its kind in the English language, for it is to be compared with *Buckingham's Rehearsal* and *Fielding's Midas*, not with *Beaumont's Knight of the Burning Pestle*. The wit always tells and never tires.

Thus, at the age of twenty-eight, Sheridan, the “impenetrable dunce” of his first schoolmaster, had contrived to enrich English letters with a series of plays which are to English prose what Pope's satires are to English verse. We may now pause to consider the nature and extent of his comic powers, and his claim to be ranked among the masters of comic genius.

Sheridan's defects as a dramatist answer to the defects of his mind and character. Acute in observing external appearances, and well informed in what rakes and men of fashion call life, he was essentially superficial in mind and

heart. A man of great wit and fancy, he was singularly deficient in the deeper powers of humor and imagination. All his plays lack organic life. In plot, character, and incident, they are framed by mechanical, not conceived by vital, processes. They evince no genial enjoyment of mirth, no insight into the deeper springs of the ludicrous. The laughter they provoke is the laughter of antipathy, not of sympathy. It is wit detecting external inconsistencies and oddities, not humor representing them in connection with the inward constitution whence they spring. The great triumphs of comic genius have been in comic creations, conceived through the processes of imagination and sympathy, and instinct with the vital life of mirth. Such are the comic characters of Shakspeare, of the elder dramatists generally, of Addison, Goldsmith, Fielding, Sterne, Scott, and Dickens. A writer who grasps character in the concrete gives his creation a living heart and brain. His hold upon the general conception is too firm to allow his fancy to seduce him into inconsistencies for the sake of fine separate thoughts. Every thing that the character says is an expression of what the character is. Such a creation impresses the mind as a whole. Its unity is never lost in the variety of its manifestation. This is evident enough in the case of Falstaff, for the living idea of the man impressed on our imaginations gives more mirthful delight than his numberless witticisms. The witticisms, indeed, owe much of their effect to their intimate relation with the character. But the principle is no less true, though less evident, of Mercutio, Beatrice, and the airier creations of mirth generally. We conceive of them all as living beings, whose wit and humor do not begin with their entrance, or cease with their exit from the scene, but overflow in fun, whether we are by to hear or not. Such creations represent the poetry of mirth, and spring from profound and creative minds.

Now Sheridan's comic personages display none of this life and genial fun. They seem sent upon the stage simply to utter brilliant things, and their wit goes out with their exit. Every thing they say is as good as the original conception of their individuality, and character is therefore lost in the glare of its representation. In truth, Sheridan conceived a character as he conceived a jest. It first flashed upon his mind in an epigrammatic form. In his Memoranda, published by

Moore, we find the hints of various dramatic personages embodied in smart sayings. Thus, one is indicated in this significant sentence : — “ I shall order my valet to shoot me the first thing he does in the morning.” Another is sketched as “ an old woman endeavouring to put herself back into a girl ” ; another, as a man “ who changes sides in all arguments the moment you agree with him ” ; and another, as a “ pretty woman studying looks, and endeavouring to recollect an ogle, like Lady —, who has learned to play her eyelids like Venetian blinds.” In all these we perceive the wit laughing at external peculiarities, and subjecting them to the malicious exaggerations of fancy, but not the dramatist searching for internal qualities, and moulding them into new forms of mirthful being. The character is but one of the many pleasantries it is made to speak. In those instances where Sheridan most nearly produces the effects of humor, it is done by the coöperation of brisk animal spirits with fancy, or by adopting and refining upon the delineations of others.

We would not, in these remarks, be considered as underrating Sheridan's real powers. He is undoubtedly to be placed among the wittiest of writers and speakers. His plays, speeches, and the records of his conversation sparkle with wit of almost all kinds, from the most familiar to the most recondite. Though seldom genial, it is never malignant ; and if it rarely reaches far beneath the surfaces of things, it plays over them with wonderful brilliancy. No English comic writer, who was not also a great poet, ever approached him in fineness and remoteness of ludicrous analogy. In delicacy of allusion, in exquisite lightness and certainty of touch, in concise felicity and airiness of expression, his wit is almost unmatched. It has been asserted that he had not a fertile fancy, and that he gained much of his reputation by the care with which he husbanded his stores. He was doubtless often complimented for his readiness when he least deserved it, and was cunning in the concealment of preparation. But we think he was so entirely a wit as to be choice to daintiness in what he employed, and to aim at perfection in its verbal expression. He would not always trust to a mere flow of animal spirits to fashion the light idea of the minute ; for his object was not mere hilarity, but the keen, subtle, piercing strokes of the intellect. We believe he suppressed more sparkling jokes than he ever wrote or

uttered ; that the fertility of his fancy was great, but that its expression was checked by his taste. There are as many stories of his readiness as of his premeditation. His calling Whitbread's image of the phoenix "a poulterer's description of a phoenix," and his objecting to a tax on mile-stones as unconstitutional, because "they were a race who could not meet to remonstrate," are as happy as any of his most elaborated epigrams.

Brilliant as had been the success of Sheridan as a dramatist, he commenced, shortly after the production of *The Critic*, a still more brilliant career as an orator and politician. His powers of conversation and his delight in social pleasures brought him into terms of intimacy with many prominent members of the Whig opposition, who could appreciate both his talents and good-fellowship. Through Lord John Townsend, he became acquainted with Mr. Fox, and they were mutually pleased at their first meeting. Fox declared Sheridan the wittiest man he had ever known. An introduction to Burke soon followed. He soon became one of the most welcome visitors at Devonshire House, "where politics was made to wear its most attractive form, and sat enthroned, like Virtue among the Epicureans, with all the Graces and Pleasures for handmaids." At Brooks's Club-house, where the Whig politicians blended conviviality with business, he soon shone preëminent among the hardest drinkers and wittiest talkers, — the very man to do honor to that

" liberal Brooks, whose speculative skill
Is hasty credit and a distant bill ;
Who, nursed in clubs, disdains a vulgar trade,
Exults to trust, and blushes to be paid."

There his spirits were repressed by no attempt on the part of his associates, noble by birth or genius, to assert the lord or the Right Honorable. The usual style of address was Jack Townsend, Ned Burke, Tom Grenville, Dick Sheridan, and the like. The ease and familiarity of the Whigs in their social intercourse, and those signs of the times which indicated their approaching change from opposition to administration, offered stimulants both to Sheridan's love of pleasure and to his ambition. He joined the party, and, with a few exceptions, was faithful to its creed and leaders through life. His brilliancy and adroitness made him an able coadjutor of Burke and Fox in assailing the corruptions of the court, and defend-

ing the liberties of the people. He was to be a thorn in the side of Toryism.

After performing some minor services to his party, he was sent to the House of Commons as member for the borough of Stafford, in October, 1780. The nation was suffering under the calamities of the American war, and Lord North's administration was assailed with every weapon of argument and invective, by an opposition strong in popular favor and aristocratic connection, but bitterly hated by the king. Sheridan's first speech was a comparative failure. It was on the subject of a petition complaining of the undue election of himself and his colleague. He launched into an indignant vindication of his constituents. When he had concluded, Mr. Rigby, a member of the Tory administration, coolly ridiculed his elaborated rage. Sheridan was not prepared to reply; but Fox came to the rescue of his friend, and informed the right honorable gentleman that "those ministerial members who chiefly robbed and plundered their constituents might afterwards affect to despise them, yet gentlemen who felt properly the nature of their trust would always treat them and speak of them with respect." In an assembly where such language as this was the commonplace of debate, it was evident that a man, to keep his position, must learn to think quick and strike hard; and Sheridan felt that he had much to learn before he could rank high in his new profession. He asked his friend Woodfall to tell him candidly what he thought of his first attempt, and received the discouraging reply, that speaking did not appear to be in his line, and that he had much better have adhered to his former pursuits. "It is in me, however," said Sheridan, after a short pause, "and by —, it shall come out!" From this moment his training as a debater commenced, and he spared no effort to perfect himself in his art.

He had many personal advantages suitable to an orator, — a powerful frame, a face which, though coarse in some of its features, was capable of great variety of expression, a deep, clear voice, and an eye of piercing brilliancy, which never winked. Beneath all his indolence and sensuality, he possessed a desire for distinction, and an ambition for effect, which inspired him with sufficient industry to master the details of particular questions, and prepare sparkling declamation to delight his audience. He had not that depth of feel-

ing and earnestness of purpose by which the great orator identifies himself with his subject ; but he could imitate those qualities admirably. His sly, subtle intellect was always on the watch for occasions for display, and he seized them with exquisite tact. Besides, he had a long training in the House of Commons ; and though as a debater he never reached the first rank, from his lack of perfect readiness and his want of familiarity with principles, he still developed in the end a sturdy political courage, and a command of expedients, which enabled him to meet without flinching the fiercest attacks of the treasury bench, and to bear bravely up even against the arrogant scorn of Pitt.

During the first few years of Sheridan's political life, he produced but a small impression, but he was steadily feeling his way into notoriety. Enjoying the friendship of Fox, Burke, and all the prominent Whigs, he was insensibly educating himself into a politician. On the overthrow of Lord North's administration, and the formation of the Marquis of Rockingham's, in March, 1782, he was appointed one of the under-secretaries of state. This office he occupied but four months. The death of Lord Rockingham split the Whig party into two divisions. One of these, the Rockingham confederacy, led by the Duke of Portland and Mr. Fox, and to which Burke and Sheridan belonged, was the traditional Whig party, the heir of the principles of the Revolution, and was supported by the strength of the old Whig families. It was essentially aristocratic in its constitution, and derived much of its power from the wealth, stability, and Parliamentary influence of the great Whig lords. The other was the remnant of Lord Chatham's party, who had combined with the Rockinghams in the opposition to Lord North, and, on the overthrow of the latter, had received a share of the spoils. It was led by Lord Shelburne, father to the present Marquis of Lansdowne, and was more popular in its character than the other division of the Whigs. George the Third, who bitterly hated the Whig oligarchy, seized the opportunity presented by the death of the Marquis of Rockingham of dealing it a heavy blow. He appointed Lord Shelburne, instead of the Duke of Portland, prime minister. Shelburne, without consulting his colleagues, accepted. Fox, Burke, and the other "old Whigs," immediately resigned, and went into opposition.

There were thus three parties in the House of Commons, the Tory adherents of Lord North making the third. To carry on the government, it was necessary for two of these to unite. After some negotiations between the two divisions of the Whigs, which resulted in nothing, Fox formed a coalition with Lord North, and, after a short, sharp struggle, came into power. This was the most imprudent thing, judged by its effects, ever done by the Whig party ; for by the great body of the nation it was considered a scandalous contempt of public principle, and it fixed an odium on Fox and Burke from which they never wholly recovered. Sheridan, who, from his lack of strong passions and high purposes, often excelled his greater contemporaries in his judgment of the temper of the people, strenuously opposed the coalition. He could not appreciate the objects of Fox and Burke, but he was shrewd enough to discover the inefficiency of their means.

In the new ministry Sheridan was made secretary of the treasury, and gained thereby some knowledge of arithmetic, which he often paraded afterwards in discussing the financial measures of Mr. Pitt. The Coalition ministry did not long exist ; it was detested both by the king and people. The most ridiculous and atrocious falsehoods were manufactured with regard to the objects of its leaders. Its fate was sealed when Mr. Fox's East India Bill was introduced. This great measure passed the House of Commons by a large majority, but it was defeated by intrigue and treachery when it came to the House of Lords. On the failure of the bill, Fox and his colleagues were instantly dismissed by the king, although they still possessed a majority of votes in the lower house. William Pitt, then just entering upon his political career, was made prime minister, — fought for three months, against a majority of the House of Commons, one of the greatest Parliamentary battles on record, — and on the dissolution of Parliament, and the election of a new House of Commons, found himself firmly seated in power. The Whigs went into long and hopeless opposition.

This was one of the most exciting periods in English political history, but its consideration belongs rather to the biography of Burke and Fox than of Sheridan. One of his most felicitous retorts, however, occurred in an early scene of this hurried drama. While Pitt was serving under Lord

Shelburne, Sheridan fired some epigrams into the ministry, which would have shone bright among his happiest dramatic sallies. Pitt, in that vein of arrogant sarcasm for which he was afterwards so much distinguished, informed him, that if such dramatic turns and epigrammatic points were reserved for their proper stage, they would doubtless receive the plaudits of the audience ; but the House of Commons was not the proper scene for them. Sheridan, who was morbidly sensitive to any allusions which connected him with the stage, determined to silence such insinuations for ever. He felt, he said, flattered and encouraged by the right honorable gentleman's panegyric on his talents, and if he ever engaged again in the compositions to which he alluded, he might be tempted to an act of presumption, — to attempt an improvement on one of Ben Jonson's best characters, — the character of the *Angry Boy* in the *Alchemist*. Nothing could have been better and bitterer than this retort ; and it pleased Sheridan so much, that he made a cast of the whole play, assigning each of the prominent opponents of his party a character in harmony with the Whig doctrine regarding his disposition. Lord Shelburne was Subtle ; Lord Thurlow, Face ; Mr. Dundas, Doll Common ; Mr. Rigby, Sir Epicure Mammon ; General Conway, Dame Pliant ; and His Majesty himself was honored with the part of Surly.

In an extravagantly burlesque sketch of Sheridan, written by his friend Tickell in a copy of *The Rivals*, there is a fine, ludicrous account of the popular clamor against the leaders of the Coalition ministry, the humor of which will be appreciated by all who know the political history of the time, and the means used to prejudice both king and people against the connection. It contains also a pertinent allusion to Sheridan's devotion to the bottle, and, through the exaggeration of caricature, enables us to judge of his habits and character at this period.

“ He [Sheridan] was a member of the last Parliaments that were summoned in England, and signalized himself on many occasions by his wit and eloquence, though he seldom came to the House till the debate was nearly concluded, and never spoke unless he was drunk. He lived on a footing of great intimacy with the famous Fox, who is said to have concerted with him the audacious attempt which he made, about the year 1783, to seize the whole property of the East India Company, amounting at

that time to about £ 12,000,000 sterling, and then to declare himself Lord Protector of the Realm by the title of Carlo Khan. This desperate scheme actually received the consent of the lower house of Parliament, the majority of whom were bribed by Fox, or intimidated by his and Sheridan's threats and violence; and it is generally believed that the Revolution would have taken place, if the lords of the king's bedchamber had not in a body surrounded the throne, and shown the most determined resolution not to abandon their posts but with their lives. The usurpation being defeated, Parliament was dissolved, and loaded with infamy. Sheridan was one of the few members of it who were reëlected; — the burgesses of Stafford, whom he had kept in a constant state of intoxication for three weeks, chose him again to represent them, which he was well qualified to do."

The fact of his reëlection, mentioned in the last sentence of this fine caricature, is the more to be noted, as a hundred and sixty members of the old Parliament, favorable to Fox and North, were defeated. These called themselves, with much truth as well as pleasantry, "Fox's Martyrs."

In following Mr. Fox into opposition, Sheridan soon became one of his most efficient supporters. Mr. Pitt's administration found in him a powerful opponent, and he was especially felicitous in ridiculing the pretensions of the Tories, and galling them with pointed declamation. Incapable of projecting leading measures, and deficient in those higher qualities of mind which made Burke and Fox great statesmen, he was the most effective of partisans. When pressed to speak on topics which required extensive knowledge, or an appeal to authorities, he would say humorously to his political friends, "You know I'm an ignoramus, but here I am; instruct me, and I will do my best." As a man of wit, of wit not only as a power of mind, but as a quality of character, he detected weak points in argument, or follies in declamation, with an instinctive insight. In the habit of recording in a memorandum-book his most ingenious thoughts as they occurred to him, he had ever at hand some felicities to weave into every speech. A few of his brilliant ideas absolutely haunted him, and he took especial pleasure in varying their application, and making them tell on different occasions. One of these is well known. In his private memoranda he speaks of one "who employs his fancy in his narratives, and keeps his recollections for his wit." This idea was afterwards directed against a composer of music turned wine-merchant, — a

man, he said, "who composed his wine and imported his music"; and was finally shot off, in a seemingly careless parenthesis, in a speech in reply to Dundas, — a right honorable gentleman, ("who depends on his imagination for his facts, and his memory for his wit,") &c. Again, he had a great love of a witty metaphor drawn from the terms of military science. It first appears as a kind of satire on his own reputation for extempore jests. "A true-trained wit," he says, "lays his plan like a general, — foresees the circumstances of the conversation, — surveys the ground and contingencies, — and detaches a question to draw you into the palpable ambushcade of his ready-made joke." In another memorandum he sketches a lady who affects poetry. "I made regular approaches to her by sonnets and rebuses, — a rondeau of circumvallation, — her pride sapped by an elegy, and her reserve surprised by an impromptu; proceeding to storm with Pindarics, she, at last, saved the further effusion of ink by a capitulation." Exquisite as this is, it is even exceeded in the shape in which he presented the general idea in the House of Commons. Among the members of the Whig party who had ratted, and gone over to the administration, was the Duke of Richmond, a man who had been foremost in the extreme radical ranks of his former connections. In the session of 1786, the duke brought forward a plan for the fortification of dock-yards. Sheridan subjected his Report to a scorching speech. He complimented the duke for the proofs he had given of his genius as an engineer.

"He had made his Report," said Sheridan, "an argument of posts; and conducted his reasoning upon principles of trigonometry as well as logic. There were certain detached data, like advanced works, to keep the enemy at a distance from the main object in debate. Strong provisions covered the flanks of his assertions. His very queries were in casements. No impression, therefore, was to be made on this fortress of sophistry by desultory observations; and it was necessary to sit down before it, and assail it by regular approaches. It was fortunate, however, to observe, that notwithstanding all the skill employed by the noble and literary engineer, his mode of defence on paper was open to the same objections which had been urged against his other fortifications; that if his adversary got possession of one of his posts, it became strength against him, and the means of subduing the whole line of his argument."

From 1780, the period of his entering Parliament, to

1787, Sheridan, though he had spoken often, had made no such exhibition of his powers as to gain the reputation of a great orator. But about this time the genius and moral energy of Burke started a subject, which not only gave full expression to his own great nature, but afforded the orators of his party a rare occasion for the most dazzling displays of eloquence. We refer, of course, to the impeachment of Hastings. In all matters relating to the affairs of India, Burke bore sovereign sway in his party. It was he who projected the unsuccessful India Bill, on which the Coalition ministry was wrecked. Defeat, however, was not likely to damp the energies of a mind like his, when it had once fastened on an object; and he kept alive among his associates the determination to bring the spoilers of India to a public account for their misdeeds, and to hold them up to hatred and execration as worthy successors of Cortés and Pizarro, in plundering and depopulating the empire they had conquered. Burke was the only man in England in whom the prosecution of Indian delinquency and atrocity was a fixed passion as well as a fixed principle. By his ardor and complete comprehension of the subject, he communicated his enthusiasm to his party, — a party which always appeared best when it had public criminals to brand and public corruptions to expose. In bringing forward in the House of Commons the various charges against Hastings, the charge relating to the spoliation of the Begums was allotted to Sheridan. He was probably well supplied by Burke with materials, and he resolutely determined to give the subject that attention which would enable him to make an effective speech. Of all the men engaged in the prosecution, he was perhaps the most superficial in the feeling with which he regarded the crimes against which he was to declaim. His conscience and passions were not deeply stirred against the criminal. Hunt says, in his light way, that the inspiration of Burke in this matter was a jealous hatred of wrong, the love of right that of Fox, “and the opportunity of making a display at somebody’s expense that of Sheridan, without any violent care either for right or wrong.” With regard to the latter, at least, the remark is just. We can conceive of nothing more ludicrous than the idea of Sheridan sitting down with his bottle and documents, and, by dint of hard drinking and cautious reading, concocting ingenious epigrams out of the frauds, and framing

theatrical thunder against the crimes, of the great oppressor of India.

However, the event was such as to reward all his diligence. His speech was made on February 7, 1787, and occupied five hours and a half in the delivery. All parties agreed in its extravagant praise. Fox said, that all he had ever heard, all that he had ever read, when compared with it, dwindled into nothing, and vanished like vapor before the sun. Burke and Pitt declared it to be unequalled in ancient or modern eloquence. Logan, who had written a defence of Hastings, went that evening to the House with the strongest prepossession against Sheridan and in favor of Hastings. After the former had been speaking an hour, he observed to a friend, — "All this is declamatory assertion, without proof." When he left the House, at the end of the speech, he exclaimed, — "Of all monsters of iniquity the most enormous is Warren Hastings." Windham, who was no friend to Sheridan, said, twenty years afterwards, that, in spite of some faults of taste, it was the greatest speech within the memory of man. The most significant sign of its effect was the adjournment of the House, on the ground that the members were too much excited to render a fair judgment on the case, — a ground that Burke very happily ridiculed. The practice of cheering at the end of a good speech commenced with this splendid effort of Sheridan.

There can be little doubt that this was, on the whole, the greatest production of Sheridan's mind. There is no report of it deserving the name. Although he had the speech written out, he would never publish it. With his usual sagacity, he judged that the tradition of its effects would give him more fame than the production itself. To account for his success is difficult. A great deal is to be referred to the materials which his subject presented for oratorical display, to his beautiful delivery of particular passages, to the care with which he elaborated the whole, and to the surprise of the House at its superiority over all his previous speeches. He most certainly did not possess that deep feeling of horror and detestation for the crimes of Hastings which animated the breast of Burke. Several years afterwards, when the Prince of Wales introduced him to Hastings, he had the meanness to tell the latter that he had attacked him merely in the way of his vocation as a Whig politician, and trusted

that it would not be considered as a test of his private feelings. Hastings did not condescend to answer him, but turned scornfully away. If the passion was thus in a great measure simulated, it certainly was not expressed, as far as we can judge from passages here and there in the imperfect printed report, in a style very much above verbiage and fustian. The passages which would have best vindicated the eulogies it received were probably the epigrammatic portions ; and these must have been of surpassing brilliancy, not only from the ingenuity of Sheridan's mind, but from the startling contrasts with which the subject itself was replete. Thus, the most felicitous passage which can be gleaned from the printed report is that in which reference is made to the sordid spirit of trade which blended with all the operations of the East India Company as a government, and disgraced even their boldest achievements, which showed the meanness of peddlers and the profligacy of pirates.

"Alike," he says, "in the political and military line could be observed auctioneering ambassadors and trading generals ; — and thus we saw a revolution brought about by affidavits ; an army employed in executing an arrest ; a town besieged on a note of hand ; a prince dethroned for the balance of an account. Thus it was they exhibited a government which united the mock majesty of a bloody sceptre and the little traffic of a merchant's counting-house, — wielding a truncheon with one hand, and picking a pocket with the other."

On the 3d of June, 1778, Sheridan, having been appointed one of the managers of the impeachment of Hastings, delivered before the Lords in Westminster Hall another oration on the same charge he had so brilliantly urged in the House of Commons. The fashionable excitement caused by this great state trial is said to have reached its height on the occasion of his speech. Fifty guineas were known to have been paid for a ticket. The oration, including the examination of evidence, occupied four days ; and although it did not wring the hearts and overpower the understandings of the audience, like the impassioned and comprehensive orations with which Burke opened the impeachment, it still produced the liveliest sensation. Burke, whose whole soul was in the success of the cause, and who was delighted with every thing which helped it forward in popular estimation, was heated with admiration during its delivery. "There," he exclaimed to

Fox, while listening to some passages, "there, that is the true style ; something between poetry and prose, and better than either." Fox replied, that he thought the mixture was likely to produce poetic prose, or, what was worse, prosaic poetry.

On the fourth day, Sheridan strained his powers to the utmost, to charm and dazzle his auditory. In referring to one crime of Hastings, he made an allusion to the great historian of the age. Gibbon was present, and in his *Memoirs* has recorded the pleasure he experienced in receiving such a compliment before all that was great and noble in the nation. "Not in the annals of Tacitus," said Sheridan, "not on the *luminous* page of Gibbon, could be found described such a monstrous act of cruelty and treachery." At the conclusion of the speech, he sunk back in the arms of Burke, as if overcome with fatigue and emotion. One of his prosaic Whig friends came up to him, and said, — "Why, Sherry, did you compliment that Tory, Gibbon, with the epithet *luminous*?" "I said *vo-luminous*," answered Sheridan, in a hoarse whisper.

It is commonly believed that the speech in Westminster Hall was substantially the same as that delivered in the House of Commons, although, in its diffusion through two days, Fox and many others considered it inferior to his first effort. Burke, however, in his celebrated eulogy on the oration, said, that from poetry up to eloquence, there was not a species of composition of which a complete and perfect specimen might not be culled from it. Now there is extant a *verbatim* report of the speech ; and Mr. Moore, in his *Life of Sheridan*, has quoted all those passages which even the partiality of a biographer could pronounce excellent. It is scarcely necessary to say, that there is hardly a page in Burke's own works which is not worth the whole of Sheridan's fine writing, as far as eloquence can be estimated from the written composition. Burke's extravagant praise is to be referred partly to the magnanimity of a rival orator, emulous to outdo all others in hearty recognition of another's merits, and partly to his intense enthusiasm for every effective speech delivered on his side of the subject. In him, the success of the impeachment swallowed up every desire for personal notoriety or fame in its prosecution, and he naturally exaggerated the merit of all arguments and eloquence

which illustrated or enforced his own views. Sheridan cared little for the impeachment, but cared much for the reputation of a brilliant speech. Posterity has dealt fairly with both. Burke has succeeded in fixing an ineradicable brand of guilt on the brow of an able and unprincipled public criminal, whose great capacity and great services seemed to overawe the world's moral judgment, and has consigned him to an immortality of infamy in orations as imperishable as literature. Sheridan has succeeded in gaining the reputation of an infinitely clever and dexterous speaker, the records of whose speeches are read only in a vain attempt to discover by what jugglery of action such ingenious combinations of words ever imposed upon an audience as the genuine language either of reason, imagination, or passion.

As an orator, Sheridan belongs to a peculiar class. He was certainly the most artificial of speakers, when his ambition led him to imitate Fox in impassioned declamation, or Burke in luminous disquisition and imaginative expression. Moore, in a strain of exquisite flattery, celebrates him as one

“ Whose eloquence, brightening whatever it tried,
Whether reason or fancy, the gay or the grave,
Was as rapid, as deep, and as brilliant a tide
As ever bore Freedom aloft on its wave.”

Nothing, as Moore well knew, was more incorrect than the impression of spontaneousness which this eulogy conveys. The private memoranda of Sheridan's speeches show the exact place where the “ Good God, Mr. Speaker,” is to be introduced ; and exhibit painfully elaborated “ bursts ” of passion, into which it was his intention to be “ hurried.” With regard to imagery, those figures which start up in the mind of the true orator in the excitement of the moment, instinct with the life of the occasion, were in Sheridan's case carefully fashioned out beforehand and bedizened with verbal frippery, cold and lifeless in themselves, but made to tell upon the audience by grace and energy of manner. It has been repeatedly noticed, that in the notes of Burke's speeches nothing is observable but the outline of the argument and the heads of the information ; in the notes of Sheridan's, little is seen but images, epigrams, and exclamations.

Sheridan has been often classed with Irish orators, that

is, with orators having more feeling and imagination than taste. Irish oratory, it is very certain, is not confined to Hibernians, neither does it comprehend all Irish speakers. Its leading characteristic is sensibility. But this sensibility is good or bad, according to the mental powers by which it is accompanied. In Burke, it appeared in connection with an understanding and an imagination greater than any other orator ever possessed, and second, if second at all, only to Bacon among statesmen. In Grattan, it took the form of fiery patriotism, stimulating every faculty of his intellect, and condensing the expression of thought and fancy by pervading both with earnest passion. In Curran, it quickened into almost morbid action one of the readiest and most fertile, though not comprehensive, minds ever placed in a human brain. In Shiel, it is seen in the rapidity, intensity, and intellectual fierceness given to the expression of blended argument and fancy. In all of these, sensibility is more or less earnest and genuine, penetrating thought with fire, and thus giving force to the will as well as persuasion to the understanding. In another class of Irish orators, of which Phillips was once considered the representative, this sensibility is little more than the boiling over of warm blood, without corresponding power of thought or imagination; and it runs into all excesses of verbose declamation and galvanized commonplace. Execrable as it is, however, and doomed to instant damnation in a tempest of hisses as soon as it is printed, it is still not without effect upon uncultivated or excited audiences. This style of oratory is sometimes called imaginative, although its leading absurdities are directly traceable to a want of imagination. It is no more imaginative than Swift's mock reasoning to prove that Partridge was dead is argumentative.

Now to neither of these classes of Irish orators does Sheridan belong; for genuine sensibility, either in the expression of reason or nonsense, does not enter into the composition of his speeches. He feels neither like Burke nor like Phillips. In serious declamation, he simply attempts an imitation of intense and elevated feeling; and his passion, as artificial and as much made up as the thunder of Drury Lane, finds suitable expression in a diction curiously turgid, in meretricious ornaments, and in a style of imagery plastered upon the argument, instead of growing out of it. If, as a

speaker, he had used this florid style without stint, he must have failed. We believe that it did not please his contemporaries much more than it does posterity, and that it was generally held by them to bear about the same relation to the peculiar merits of his speeches which the fine talk of Falkland and Julia bears to the fun of Acres and the wit of Captain Absolute. What placed him by the side of Burke, Fox, and Windham, as an orator, was not his earnestness of feeling, but his equalling them in the felicity with which they exposed crime, corruption, sophistry, and hypocrisy to ridicule and contempt. His most successful imitations of Burke consist in the employment of verbal paradoxes and ironical fancies, in which the opinions and statements of an opponent are exaggerated into a kind of gigantic caricature and then scornfully eulogized. Pretence of all kinds soon collapses, when subjected to this ordeal of wasting ridicule. The bubble bursts at once, and "is resolved into its elemental suds." As far as we can judge of Sheridan's great speech on the Begums, his most effective weapon of attack was a sarcastic mockery of Hastings's assignment of patriotic motives for his crimes, an epigrammatic expression of hatred and scorn for oppression and rapine, and a singular felicity in dragging down the governor of a vast empire to the level of the common herd of profligates and criminals, by connecting his greatest acts with the same motives which influence the pickpocket and the cutthroat. By bringing the large conceptions and beneficent aims which should characterize a ruler of nations into startling contrast with the small personal objects which animate the heroes of Hounslow heath, he had an opportunity to play the dazzling fence of his wit with the most brilliant effect. Many of his most swollen comparisons and strained metaphors are redeemed from absolute contempt only by the presence of this mocking spirit. That his great strength consisted in this power of viewing every thing under its ludicrous relations is seen in the rapidity with which he ever extricated himself from the consequences of failure in his florid flights. Mr. Law, the counsel for Hastings, very successfully ridiculed one of the hectic metaphors of his speech. "It was the first time in his life," replied Sheridan, "he had ever heard of special pleading on a metaphor, or a bill of indictment against a trope. But such was the turn of the

learned counsel's mind, that when he attempted to be humorous, no jest could be found, and when serious, no fact was visible." This retort is worth a thousand such tropes as occasioned it.

Up to the impeachment of Hastings, Fox, Burke, and Sheridan were closely united ; but the illness of the king, which soon followed, brought a question before Parliament, which, while it seemed to promise the accession of the Whigs to power, resulted only in sowing the seeds of distrust among their leaders. George the Third became insane, and it devolved upon the legislature to appoint or recognize a regent. The Prince of Wales, a selfish debauchee and spendthrift, was the person that would naturally be appointed ; and the Prince, hating his father and hated by him, was a Whig. Mr. Pitt and the Tories were determined to restrict his prerogative ; the Whigs struggled to have him endowed with the full powers of majesty. A fierce war of words and principles was the consequence, in which Fox and Burke gave way to unwonted gusts of passion, and Burke, especially, indulged in some unwise allusions to the king's situation. Sheridan, who for a long time had been the companion of the Prince in his pleasures, and in some degree his agent in the House of Commons, was suspected by his friends of intriguing for a higher office than his station in the party would warrant. The king's recovery put an end to the debates, and to the hopes of each. A portion of the disappointment which Burke and Fox experienced was transmuted into dislike of each other, each feeling that the violence of the discussion had injured the party, and each placing the blame upon the other. Both were suspicious of Sheridan, also, and doubted his honorable dealing in the matter.

This slight feud would probably have been soon healed, if the breaking out of the French Revolution had not given an immediate occasion for all the discontent in the party to explode. Burke, from the first, looked upon that portentous event with distrust ; Fox and Sheridan hailed it as an omen of good. The debate on the Army Estimates, in 1790, was the first public sign of the schism between the leaders of the Whigs. Sheridan, who seems to have foreseen that Fox and Burke must eventually dissolve their connection, took this opportunity, in an animated but indiscreet speech against Burke's views, to hasten the separation ; but he only suc-

ceeded in bringing Burke's wrath down upon his own head, and a public disavowal of their friendship. The progress of the Revolution, however, soon brought on the final division of the Whig party, upon which a majority of its most influential members went over with Burke to the support of the ministry. Fox and Sheridan, not on the most cordial terms themselves, were left to battle, in the House of Commons, both against their old enemies and a powerful body of their old friends.

There is no portion of Sheridan's political life which is more honorable than his services to freedom during the stormy period between 1793 and 1801. It was a time of extreme opinions. The French Revolution had unsettled the largest intellects of the age, and seditious and despotic principles clashed violently against each other. The Tories, to preserve order, seemed bent on destroying freedom; and the radicals, enraged at the attacks on freedom, or deluded by the abstract commonplaces of the French school, overlooked order in their struggle against oppression. Fox, Sheridan, Grey, Tierney, Erskine, were the nucleus of a legal opposition to the ministry, and, at the head of a small minority of Whigs, defended the free principles of the constitution against the court, the administration, and popular clamor. Sheridan adhered generally to his party, though he contrived to escape some of their glorious unpopularity by giving a hearty support to the government on a few trying occasions. His various speeches during this period display his usual brilliancy, with passages here and there of powerful declamation. It is needless to say that his dissipation and debts were on the increase. His patriotism was not allowed to dull the edge of his sensuality. In his habits of mystification, too, in the preparation of his speeches, he displayed his customary cunning. In 1794, when called upon, as one of the prosecutors of Hastings, to reply to Mr. Law, he spent two or three days in such close application to reading and writing, as to complain to a friend of having motes in his eyes. When he entered Westminster Hall, he was asked by one of his brother-managers for his bag and papers. He answered, that he had none, and must get through with his speech as he best might; — "he would abuse Ned Law, ridicule Plumer's long orations, make the court laugh, please the women, and, in short, go triumphantly through his task." Much to the surprise of the managers, he succeeded admirably.

In 1792, Mrs. Sheridan died. She was a woman of fine mind, warm heart, and uncommon beauty, entering with zeal into her husband's interests, and making his home as happy as the home of a libertine could be, who was gifted with good-nature rather than principle, with affectionate sensations rather than a heart. In 1795, Sheridan married again. The lady was Miss Ogle, daughter of the Dean of Winchester, and represented as young, accomplished, and thoroughly in love. Sheridan's powers of fascination neither dissipation nor the reputation of a *roué* could weigh down.

During this stormiest period of English politics, Sheridan preserved the same virtue in his speeches and the same self-indulgence in his conduct which characterized his whole life. When Pitt resigned, and the Addington ministry was formed, in 1801, he, following the example of a few other Whigs, gave that feeble government, with its toothless Toryism, a kind of support. But the inflated incapacity of that administration could not fail to draw laughter from him, the prince of laughers. Addington was nicknamed "The Doctor." When one of his measures was suddenly opposed by the Scotch members, usually loyal to ministers, Sheridan set the House of Commons in a roar by addressing the premier, from Macbeth, — "Doctor, the thanes fly from thee!" On the return of Pitt to power, Sheridan went again into opposition. Of all his later speeches, his most celebrated is one which he made in 1805, on his motion for repealing the Defence Act. It was written during the debate, at a coffee-house near Westminster Hall, and was full of the fiercest attacks upon the premier. Pitt, commonly so insensible, is said to have writhed under its declamatory sarcasm; and many who were present thought they discerned at times in his countenance an intention to fix a personal quarrel upon his flashing adversary. After the death of Pitt, in 1806, and the formation of the Fox and Grenville ministry, Sheridan was appointed Treasurer of the Navy, an office which he deemed altogether below his deserts, and which indicated that his position in the party had not advanced since 1789. The administration was dissolved shortly after the death of Fox, owing to the determination of Lord Grenville to push the Catholic claims. Sheridan, though an Irishman himself, and with every feeling of nationality arrayed on the side of Catholic emancipation, was still vexed at the ministry for committing itself to the measure,

from his selfish fear of losing office. He knew the king would not consent to it, and he had not the high Roman feeling of Lord Grenville, who was indisposed to shape his course according to the path marked by the bigotry of the monarch. "He had heard," Sheridan said, "of people knocking out their brains against a wall; but never before knew of any one building a wall expressly for the purpose."

After his loss of office, Sheridan's efforts in Parliament were not frequent. He became engaged in various intrigues regarding the formation of new administrations, in which he lost the confidence of his political friends. His intimacy with the Prince of Wales, and his declining health and reputation, seem equally to have hurried him into dishonorable tricks and insincerities. At last, in 1812, rendered desperate by the loss of his theatrical property, embarrassed in purse and almost bankrupt in character, he closed a brilliant political life by an act of treachery which will ever stain his name. On the death of Mr. Perceval, great difficulty was experienced in forming an administration. There was a probability of the Whigs again coming into power; overtures were made to Lords Grey and Grenville to form a ministry. They would not accept, unless the household were dismissed. Lord Yarmouth, one of this number, requested Sheridan to convey to the two Whig lords their intention to resign, rather than be an obstacle to the formation of a ministry. Had Sheridan done this, the political history of England might have been essentially different, and measures of reform might have dated from 1812, instead of 1832. But he betrayed his trust, partly because he was aware that the Prince Regent did not really desire the accession of the Whigs, and partly because he disliked the inflexible character of the lords who would have been at the head of affairs. He not only did not communicate the offer of Lord Yarmouth, but, when a rumor of it had transpired, offered to bet five hundred guineas that it was not in contemplation. His treachery was discovered too late to be repaired. Lord Liverpool, "common-place and loving place," obtained the premiership, and held it during fifteen years of Tory rule.

Closely following this shipwreck of character, Sheridan lost his seat in Parliament. This was almost equivalent to a loss of his personal liberty, for he was no longer safe from arrest. From this time to his death, he gathered in the harvest of

long years of indolence, extravagance, and vice. Disease was secretly wearing away his originally powerful constitution. His face, once so full of intelligence and beauty, had become deformed and bloated with intemperance. His old friends looked coldly upon him. Brilliant powers of conversation and fascinating address no longer characterized the faded wit and shattered debauchee. The Prince Regent, for whom he had so often sacrificed his interest and honor, left him "naked to his enemies." All the mortifications which could result from wounded pride and vanity, and the sense of decaying intellect, thickened upon him. His ruin was swift and sure. His creditors seized upon every thing which the pawnbroker had not already taken. Even Reynolds's portrait of his first wife as Saint Cecilia passed from his possession. In the spring of 1815, he was arrested and carried to a sponging-house, where he was retained two or three days. His life sufficiently shows that his sense of shame was not quick, but he was deeply humiliated at this arrest, feeling it as "a profanation of his person."

And now came the misery of his last scene. He appeared to feel that his life was drawing to a close. To some sharp remonstrances from his wife on his continued irregularities, he replied in an affecting letter. "Never again," he wrote, "let one harsh word pass between us during the period, which may not perhaps be long, that we are in this world together, and life, however clouded to me, is spared to us." His last illness soon followed. Even his dying bed was not free from the incursions of writs and sheriffs. He was arrested, and would have been taken away in his blankets, had not his physician threatened the officer with the consequences of committing murder. At last, on the seventh of July, 1816, in his sixty-fifth year, he died.

Then came the mockery of a splendid burial. Dukes, royal and noble, bishops, marquesses, earls, viscounts, right honorables, emulously swelled the train of his funeral. "France," said a French journalist at the time, "is the place for an author to live in, and England the place for him to die in." In the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey, the only spot remaining unoccupied was reserved for the body of him whose death-bed was not safe from the sheriff's writ. Tom Moore, in a fine strain of poetical indignation, published just after Sheridan's death, thus cuttingly refers to the noble lords who "honored" the funeral : —

“ How proud they can press to the funeral array
Of him whom they shunned in his sickness and sorrow !
How bailiffs may seize his last blanket to-day,
Whose pall shall be held up by nobles to-morrow ! ”

The task of lightening the misery of Sheridan's last hours was left to such commoners as Samuel Rogers, Thomas Moore, and good Doctor Bain.

The moral of Sheridan's life lies on the surface, and we shall not risk any commonplaces of ethical horror in commenting upon its hollowness and its sins. The vices for which he was distinguished are generally reprobated, and their position in the scale of wickedness is sufficiently marked ; but they are not the darkest kind of vices. We are not of that number who select him from his contemporaries, and expend upon his follies and errors the whole strength of their indignation. Allowing him to have been as bad as his nature would allow, we believe he was a much better man than many of his contemporaries who are commonly praised as virtuous. The man who brings misery upon himself and his family by intemperance and sloth is justly condemned, but he is innocent compared with one who, from bigotry or lust of power, would ruin or injure a nation. George the Third is praised as a good king ; but the vices of Sheridan's character were mere peccadilloes compared with the savage vices which raged and ruled in the heart of his Majesty. In a moral estimate which included all grades of sin, Sheridan would compare well even with Lord North, William Pitt, or Spencer Perceval, with all their social and domestic merits. The American war and the war with France originated, or, at least, were continued, in a spirit which approaches nearer to the diabolical than the sensuality of Sheridan ; and we feel little disposed to chime in with that morality which passes over all the rats and libticides, the servile politicians and selfish statesmen, the bad and bigoted spendthrifts of blood and treasure, during a whole generation, to hurl its heaviest anathemas upon one poor, weak, volatile, brilliant, and hard-pressed *roué*.

But while we thus remember that there are natures which have continued to indulge darker passions than he ever dreamed of, without coming under the ban of either historian or moralist, and while we therefore have little sympathy with one class of Sheridan's judges and critics, we do not join in the absurd sentimentality of another class, who strive hard to

class his case among the infirmities and calamities of genius. The sources of his errors were not those which have sometimes hurried large and unregulated minds into evil, and there is something ridiculous in placing him by the side of the Otways, the Savages, the Chattertons, the Burns, and the Byrons. With regard to his calamities, there is hardly another instance in literary history of a man who enjoyed so much fame with such moderate powers, and who was enabled to run so undisturbed a career of sensuality from manhood to within three years of his death. What commonly goes under the name of enjoyment of life he had in full measure, not only without the check which comes from means limited by honest scruples, but almost without the remorse with which conscience usually dashes unhallowed pleasure. And with respect to the desertion of which he complained in the last years of his life, it was, as far as regarded his political connections, the result of his political treachery; and as his personal friendships sprang from the fellowship of vice rather than feeling, he had no right to expect that the rakes and good-fellows, his companions of the bottle and the debauch, would be the bankers of his poverty, or the consolers of his dying hours.

ART. IV. — *Modern Painters.* By a Graduate of Oxford. First American from the third London Edition, revised by the Author. New York: Wiley & Putnam. 1847. 12mo. pp. 422.

THIS is a book written by a well-educated man, a close and intelligent observer of nature, familiar with the best works of art, and himself a practical, though, as we understand him, not a professional, artist; thus seeming to combine qualifications for writing well on this difficult subject, which are not often found united. That he is not a professional artist does not the less entitle him to our attention; such persons being very apt to become too much absorbed in the mere difficulties of their pursuit to preserve the breadth of mind necessary to comprehend the whole subject. The best works on art that were ever written are Sir Joshua Reynolds's desultory Notes